

Growing African Violets

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African Violets (*Saintpaulia*) are originally from the East Coast of Africa. They developed in the cool, moist, forests in that part of the world. Over twenty wild species and variants have been found to date. The wild African violets all have blue violet flowers. The amazing range of colors found in domestic African violets are the result of hybridization.

African violets come in many sizes, from less than three inches around to over sixteen inches around. They come in the traditional rosette and in trailing varieties.

To grow African violets, you first have to pot them properly. They like light and porous soil. Some stores sell an African violet potting mixture. If you cannot find one, however, you can mix 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 perlite, and 1/3 vermiculite to make a potting mix for your African violet.

Once you pot your African violet, you will need to water it. Water should be de-chlorinated and contain weak fertilizer. Do not water by pouring the water in from the top. Water from the bottom. Two easy ways to do that are by using a porous African violet pot or by using a wick. Using an African violet pot is simple. You simply put water in the saucer and the porous pot wicks it into the soil. To use a wick, you place a string of synthetic material through the hole in the bottom of the pot and then fill the pot normally with dirt. You place your pot on top of a small plastic container full of water. The lid of the plastic container should have a hole large enough for the wick to enter. As the soil in the pot dries out, moisture will wick up into it from the container below. Simply keep the bottom container full of water and the plant will water itself.

African violets need light to grow. This can be provided by putting the violet in the windowsill or with artificial lights. If you use artificial lights, place them two to three inches above the pot so the plant will not get leggy and weak reaching for the light. Adjust the height of the light as the plant grows.

African violets have a rather narrow temperature range at which they thrive. Nighttime temperatures should be 65 to 70 degrees F. Daytime temperatures should be 70 to 90 degrees F. Plants that are grown in areas where the temperature is below 60 degrees F will have deformed leaves and blooms. Plants that are in places where the temperature is over 90 degrees F may die. For best results, do not let your plants get below 60 degrees or above 90 degrees F.

African violets prefer just a little more humidity than most homes provide. You can set the saucer in a pan filled with a little amount of water to increase humidity, but do not let the saucer remain full of water or you will drown your plant.

African violets need a lot of fertilizer. Look for one formulated for African violets that does not contain urea. It should be water soluble so you can include it in the water when you give your plants a drink. Follow label directions when using the fertilizer.